

Iraq Will Have to Wait: Get Ready for the War against Iran

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The long-awaited “progress report” of Gen. David Petraeus and Ambassador Ryan Crocker on the status of the occupation of Iraq has been made, providing Americans, via the compliant media, with the spectacle of loyal Bush yes men offering faith-based analysis in lieu of fact-based assessment. In the days and weeks that have since passed, two things have become clear: Neither Congress nor the American people (including the antiwar movement) have a plan or the gumption to confront President Bush in anything more than cosmetic fashion over the war in Iraq, and while those charged with oversight mill about looking to score cheap political points and/or save face, the administration continues its march toward conflict with Iran unimpeded.

Bush responded to the Petraeus report by indicating that he would be inclined to start reducing the level of U.S. forces in Iraq sometime *soon* (maybe December, maybe the spring of 2008). But the bottom line is that the troop levels in Iraq keep expanding, as does the infrastructure of perpetual occupation. The Democrats in Congress are focused on winning the White House in 2008, not stopping a failed war, and as such they not only refuse to decisively confront the president on Iraq, they are trying to out-posture him over who would be the tougher opponent of an expansionist Iran.

Here’s the danger: While the antiwar movement focuses its limited resources on trying to leverage real congressional opposition to the war in Iraq, which simply will not happen before the 2008 election, the Bush administration and its Democratic opponents will outflank the antiwar movement on the issue of Iran, pushing forward an aggressive agenda in the face of light or nonexistent opposition.

Of the two problems (the reality of Iraq, the potential of Iran), Iran is by far the more important. The war in Iraq isn’t going to expand tenfold overnight. By simply doing nothing, the Democrats can rest assured that Bush’s bad policy will simply keep failing. War with Iran, on the other hand, can still be prevented. We are talking about the potential for conflict at this time, not the reality of war. But time is not on the side of peace.

Three story lines unfolded earlier this month which underscore just how easily manipulated the American people, via the media, are when it comes to the issues of Iran and weapons of mass destruction. In the first, Rear Adm. Mark Fox, a spokesperson for the U.S. military in Iraq, let it be known that [U.S. forces had captured](#) a “known operative” of the “Ramazan Corps,” the ostensible branch of the Quds Force of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard command responsible for all Iranian operations inside Iraq. This “operative,” one Mahmudi Farhadi, was, according to Fox, the “linchpin” behind the smuggling of “sophisticated weapons” into Iraq by the [Quds Force](#).

We've heard this story before. In January of this year a similar raid by U.S. forces in Irbil netted six Iranians, five of whom are still in U.S. custody. Senior American officials let it be known that these Iranians were likewise members of the Quds Force, and included that organization's operations director. All were tied to the (unspecified) transfer of arms and munitions into Iraq from Iran. The Iranian government claimed, and the Iraqi government confirmed, that the detained Iranians were all attached to a trade mission in Irbil, where they oversaw legitimate commerce between Iran and Iraq along the Kurdish frontier.

The United States continues to hold the Iranians prisoner, undoubtedly subjecting them to "special treatment" in order to elicit some sort of confession, if our handling of other Iranian diplomats previously captured in Iraq is any guide. Their release any time soon is unlikely, given the impact a de facto admission that the Bush administration got it wrong would have on the overall case against Iran it is trying to build. The fate of Farhadi is likewise up in the air. None other than Kurdish President [Jalal Talabani](#), a staunch pro-American, condemned the detention of Farhadi by U.S. military forces, noting that the Iranian was a well-known businessman who was in Iraq as part of an official trade delegation. The Iranians have threatened to close down cross-border trade in Talabani's sector of Iraqi Kurdistan, shutting down a key income stream for the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, the Iraqi Kurdish faction Talabani heads. Such is the reality of modern Iraq.

But this reality is nowhere to be found in the White House. The president himself has led the charge, as recently as this past August, when [in a speech](#) to the American Legion's national convention in Reno, Nev., Bush threw down the gauntlet against Iran, declaring, "I have authorized our military commanders in Iraq to confront Tehran's murderous activities ... the Iranian regime must halt these actions." His remarks were built on [assertions he first set forth](#) in February 2007 when he highlighted his assessment of Iranian involvement inside Iraq. At that time the president declared, "I can say with certainty that the Quds Force, a part of the Iranian government, has provided these sophisticated IEDs [improvised explosive devices] that have harmed our troops." Bush avoided direct implication of the Iranian regime, stating, " ... I do not know whether or not the Quds Force was ordered from the top echelons of the government. But my point is, what's worse—they ordering it and it happening, or them not ordering it and it happening?" I might suggest that the American president putting the weight of the United States behind unsubstantiated speculation in order to build a case for war might, in fact, be worse, but since he got away with it regarding Iraqi WMD, why stop now?

In March 2007 the U.S. military paraded yet another general-cum-spokesperson before the assembled media, where it was announced that the United States had captured [Qais Khazali](#), the head of the mysteriously named "Khazali network," together with one Ali Musa Daqduq, an alleged Lebanese [Hizbollah](#) mastermind who helped plan and facilitate the actions of the Khazali network, including, it seems, an attack on U.S. forces in Karbala in January 2007 which left five American soldiers dead. This attack, in which insurgents dressed in U.S. military uniforms, drove vehicles similar to those used by the U.S. military and sported U.S. identification documents and weapons, has been linked to Iran by many in the U.S., citing nothing more than the level of sophistication involved as proof.

The golden nugget in this story was Ali Musa Daqduq. According to the U.S. military, he was a 24-year member of the Lebanese Hizbollah Party possessing extensive contacts with the Iranian Quds Force. The U.S. military referred to Daqduq as a proxy or surrogate of the Quds Force in Iraq. An alleged "special forces commander" and bodyguard to none other

than [Hassan Nasrallah](#), the head of Hizbollah in Lebanon, Daqduq was alleged to have been ordered to Iraq in 2005 for the purpose of coordinating training and operations on behalf of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard command. Daqduq supposedly helped the Iranians by training, together with the Quds Force and the Lebanese Hizbollah operatives, teams of 20 to 60 Iraqi insurgents at secret bases just outside Tehran.

With this plethora of specificity, however, comes only one item sourced directly from Ali Musa Daqduq himself—that the Iraqi insurgents responsible for the January attack on American forces in Karbala could not have conducted such a complex operation without the support and direction of the Iranian Quds Force. Daqduq wasn't quoted as saying the Iranian Quds Force was in fact involved, but simply that, in his opinion, such an operation could not have been conducted without the knowledge of the Quds Force. This, of course, brings us back full circle to the immediate period after the attack in Karbala, when U.S. military sources speculated that such an attack had to have been planned by Iran given its complexity. Nothing else is directly attributed to Daqduq, leaving open the question of sourcing and authenticity of the information being cited by the U.S. military.

From speculation to speculation, the case against the Quds Force by the Bush administration continues to lack anything in the way of substance. And yet the mythological Daqduq has become a launching platform for even graver speculation, fed by the media themselves, that the highest levels of leadership in Iran were aware of the activities of Daqduq and the Quds Force, and are thus somehow complicit in the violence. Not one shred of evidence was produced to sustain such serious accusations, and yet national media outlets such as [The New York Times](#) and [The Washington Post](#) both ran stories repeating these accusations. Politicians are formulating policy based upon such baseless accusations, and the American public continues to be manipulated into a predisposition for war with Iran largely because of such speculation. No one seems to pay attention to the fact that the U.S. military itself has subsequently contradicted its own briefings, noting in July 2007 that no persons had been captured by the United States that can provide a direct link between insurgents in Iraq and Iran. Again, in August of 2007, the U.S. military stated that it had yet to catch anyone smuggling weapons into Iraq from Iran.

And what of Daqduq himself? It seems that his Iraqi sponsor, Qais Khazali, had fallen out of favor with [Muqtada al-Sadr](#) over the strategic direction being taken, and sometime in 2006 split away from Sadr's Mehdi Army, taking some 3,000 fighters with him. In the lawless wild-West environment which dominates Iraq in the post-Saddam era, the formation of splinter militias of this sort is an everyday occurrence. Radical adventurers have historically been drawn to places of conflict, which would explain the presence of Daqduq. And it would not surprise me to find that Qais Khazali had secured funding from extremist elements inside Iran which operate outside the mandate of government, including some from within the Iranian Revolutionary Guard itself. But the notion of Iran and Hizbollah aligning themselves directly with a splinter element like the "Khazali network" is highly unlikely, to say the least.

But fiction often mirrors reality, and in the case of Iran's Quds Force, the model drawn upon by the U.S. military seems to be none other than America's own support of anti-Iranian forces, namely the Mujahedin el-Khalk (MEK) operating out of U.S.-controlled bases inside Iraq, and Jundallah, a Baluchi separatist group operating out of Pakistan that the CIA openly acknowledges supporting. Unlike the lack of evidence brought to bear by the U.S. to sustain its claims of Iranian involvement inside Iraq, the Iranian government has captured scores of

MEK and Jundallah operatives, along with supporting documents, which substantiate that which the U.S. openly admits: The United States is waging a proxy war against Iran, inside Iran. This mirror imaging of its own terror campaign against Iran to manufacture the perception of a similar effort being waged by Iran inside Iraq against the U.S. has been very effective at negating any Iranian effort to draw attention to the escalation of war-like activities inside its borders. After all, who would believe the Iranians? They are only trying to divert attention away from their own actions inside Iraq, or so the story goes.

The second story line demonstrates, apparently, that Iranian perfidy knows no bounds. Just this month, the Iranian government tried to organize a visit to Ground Zero in Manhattan by its president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who wanted to present a wreath of condolence over the tragedy that occurred there on Sept. 11, 2001. The Iranian president's proposed actions were consistent with the overall approach the Islamic Republic of Iran has taken concerning the 9/11 attack on America. Iran was one of the first Muslim nations to openly condemn the attack, expressing its condolences to those who lost their lives and calling for a worldwide mobilization against terrorism. But why let facts get in the way of fiction. Israel's ambassador to the United Nations, Dan Gillerman, set the standard for intellectual discourse on the matter when he told the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organization that a visit by President Ahmadinejad to Ground Zero would be "similar to a visit by a resurrected Hitler to Auschwitz." [Sen. John McCain](#) continued in this vein, stating that allowing Ahmadinejad to visit the site "would be an affront not only to America but to the families of our loved ones who perished there in an unprecedented act of terror." Both remarks clearly attempted to link the Iranian president, and by extension Iran, to events that they had nothing whatsoever to do with, and which they openly condemned.

9/11 linkage strategies have worked in the past, regardless of factual merit. One only need recall Saddam Hussein and Iraq to understand how easily the American public, courtesy of war-minded politicians and their co-conspirators in the mainstream media, can be so easily led down the path of holding one party accountable for the actions of another. Saddam had nothing to do with the events of 9/11, and we now occupy Iraq. Similarly, Iran had nothing to do with 9/11, and yet due in part to the distortion of fact taking place concerning allegations of Iranian "terror" activity inside Iraq, the link is clear, at least in the minds of many Americans. President Bush calls Iran a "state sponsor of terror." The military claims Iran is carrying out terror attacks against U.S. forces in Iraq. The Iranian president wanted to visit Ground Zero and was widely condemned by those who plot regime change in Iran. The Americans, bombarded with these false connections, then conclude Iran was part of the 9/11 plot. The logic is so simple, so flawed and yet so dangerously accessible to the minds of an American people fundamentally ignorant of the true situation in Iran and the Middle East today.

Which leads us to the third, and final, story line of the month: Don't believe the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Iran does have a nuclear weapons program! For weeks now, the cornerstone for the justification of American military intervention in Iran has been crumbling away, the layers and layers of fear-based fiction crafted by the Bush administration meticulously peeled away by [Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei](#) and his team of inspectors from the IAEA. After treading water for years in a sea of political intrigue, ElBaradei and his experts have finally assembled enough data to enable them to close the books on the Iranian nuclear program, noting that all substantive questions have been answered and that contrary to the speculative assessments put forward by the Bush

administration it appears that Iran's nuclear program is, in fact, dedicated to permitted energy-related activities.

Not so fast. In recent days, Israeli military aircraft, in coordination with special operations forces on the ground, [launched a preemptive raid](#) on a suspected "nuclear" target in northeast Syria. According to Israeli and U.S. intelligence sources, this site was jointly developed by Syria and North Korea for the purposes of transferring North Korea's proscribed nuclear weapons program to Syrian control. Worse, we are told by none other than former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton that this Syrian-North Korean project was being done at the behest of none other than Iran. The Syrian site, an established agriculture research center, was linked to a shipment from North Korea invoiced as cement. Israel apparently believed different. Israel has been monitoring any activity taking place inside Syria which could be linked to nuclear activity. Syria had, in the past, conducted exploratory investigation into whether phosphate deposits in Syria were viable for the manufacture of uranium for use in a nuclear energy program. Whether this activity, which has been suspended since the 1980s, was being resurrected, and whether the target bombed by Israel had anything to do with such a resurrection, is unknown at this time. What is obvious to anyone with any understanding of nuclear activities is that Syria was not pursuing a nuclear weapons program and North Korea was not supplying Syria with the components of such a program, either for Syrian use or as a proxy for Iran.

But this sort of fact-based reasoning is irrelevant, especially in the secretive circles of power that make the life-or-death decisions regarding war. The Syrian raid by Israel seems to represent a sort of "proof of capability" drill, instilling a sense of confidence in an Israeli military badly shaken from its debacle in Lebanon during the summer of 2006. The planning for the Syrian raid was a closely held secret, limited to a small cabal of right-leaning politicians in Israel and, surprisingly, the United States. The American end of the deal centered on the office of the vice president, Dick Cheney, who gave final approval to attack the Syrian target only after being rebuffed in his effort to get the Israelis to bomb the Natanz nuclear facility in Iran. Cheney, it seems, is desperate for any action that might trigger an expanded conflict with Iran. Even though the Syrian adventure did not succeed in producing such a trigger, it did wipe off the front pages of American newspapers uncomfortable story lines from the IAEA, contending as they did that Iran had no nuclear weapons program. Now, thanks to the Israeli action against Syria, which had no nuclear weapons program, the American public is in the process of being fooled into speculating that one does in fact exist not only in Syria but in Iran.

Continued war in Iraq is a tragedy. Having the conflict spread to Iran would be a disaster. No one can claim to possess a crystal ball showing the future. There are many who, when confronted with the potential for conflict with Iran, choose to brush these warnings aside, noting that such a conflict would be madness, and that the United States currently lacks the resources to fight a war with Iran. Such wishful thinking borders on irresponsible foolishness. If the headlines from this month tell us anything, it is that war with Iran is very much a possibility. The Bush administration has been actively planning war with Iran since the fall of 2004. Since that time, several windows of opportunity have presented themselves (most recently in spring 2007), but the Bush administration found itself unable to pull the trigger for one reason or another (the Navy's rejection of the presence of a third carrier battle group in the Persian Gulf scuttled the spring 2007 plans).

The administration always heeded the justifications for aborting an attack, primarily

because there was time still left on the clock, so to speak. But time is running out. Israel has drawn a red line across the calendar, indicating that if Iran has not pulled back from its nuclear ambitions by the end of 2007, military action in early spring 2008 will be inevitable. The attack on Syria by Israel sent a clear message that attacks are feasible. The continued emphasis by the Bush administration on Iran as a terror state, combined with the fact that the administration seems inclined to blame its continuing problems in Iraq on Iran, and not failed policy, means that there is no shortage of fuel to stoke the fire of public opinion regarding war with Iran. Add in the “reality” of weapons of mass destruction, and war becomes inevitable, regardless of the veracity of the “reality” being presented.

The antiwar movement in America must make a strategic decision, and soon: Contain the war in Iraq, and stop a war from breaking out in Iran. The war in Iraq can be contained simply by letting war be war. There is no genuine good news coming out of Iraq. There won't be as long as the United States is there. As callous as it sounds, let the war establish the news cycle, and let the reality of war serve to contain it. The surge has failed. Congress may not act decisively to bring the troops home, but it is highly unlikely that Congress will idly approve any massive expansion of an unpopular war that continues to fail so publicly.

Iran, however, is a different matter. Congress has already provided legal authority for the president to wage war in Iran through its existing war powers authority (one resolution passed in 2001, the other in 2002). Likewise, Congress has allowed the Bush administration to forward deploy the infrastructure of war deep into the Middle East and neighboring regions, all in the name of the “global war on terror.” The startup costs for a military strike against Iran would therefore be greatly diminished. Sustaining such a conflict is a different matter, but given current congressional reticence to stand up to a war-time president, it is highly unlikely any meaningful action would be taken to stop an Iranian war once the bombs start falling. And we should never forget that Iran has a vote in how this would end; once it is attacked, Iran will respond in ways that are unpredictable, and as such set in motion a string of cause-effect military actions with the United States and others that spins any future conflict out of control.

The highest priority for the antiwar movement in America today must be the prevention of a war with Iran. The strategic objectives should include getting Congress to repeal the war-powers authorities currently on the books, thereby forcing the president to seek new congressional approval for any new war. Likewise, a concerted effort must be undertaken to counter the disinformation being spread by the Bush administration and others about the nature of the Iranian threat. Every action undertaken by the antiwar movement must be connected to one or both of these strategic objectives. This is not the time for one-off sophomoric newspaper advertisements, but rather for sustained action focused on generating congressional hearings and public debate across the entire spectrum of American society. From the colleges and universities to the churches and on to the public square of small-town America, public information talks, presentations and panels must be held. Communities should flood local media outlets with requests for coverage and appeal to regional media to run stories. Mainstream media will follow. Demonstrations, if useful at all, must be focused events linked to an overall campaign designed to facilitate a strategic objective.

We all should remember the fall of 2002. Many felt that there was no chance for a war with Iraq, especially once U.N. inspectors made their return. In March 2003, everyone who thought so was proved wrong. The fall of 2007 is no different. There is a sense of

complacency when one speaks of the potential for a war with Iran. But time is not on the side of those who oppose conflict. If nothing is done to change the political situation inside America regarding Iran, there is an all too real possibility for a war to break out in the spring of 2008.

Sadly, there really is no alternative for the antiwar movement: Put opposition to the war in Iraq on the back burner and make preventing a war with Iran the No. 1 priority, at least until the national election cycle kicks in during the summer of 2008. If a war with Iran hasn't happened by then, it probably won't. And the national debate on Iraq won't be engaged until that time, anyway. A war with Iran would make the current conflict in Iraq pale by comparison, and would detrimentally impact the whole of America, not just certain demographics. As such, it is critical that we all put aside our ideological and political differences and focus on the one issue which, if left unheeded, will have devastating consequences for the immediate future of us all: Prevent a future war with Iran.

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